

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

H.B. 5037 An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023 - Dental Reimbursement Rates

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Dear Senators Kushner, Cicarella, Osten, Hartley, and Miner, Representatives Abercrombie, Betts, Walker, Dathan, Nolan, and France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Dr. Brianna Muñoz, and I am a board-certified pediatric dentist. On behalf of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), I fulfill the role of public policy advocate for the state of Connecticut and serve on the Pediatric Dental Medicaid & CHIP Advisory Committee. As a registered voter in the Town of Suffield, it is my personal and professional goal to promote the oral health of all Connecticut residents irrespective race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

In advancing this aim, I am testifying in support of increasing the adult dental reimbursement rates to achieve parity with the pediatric rates.

With the expansion of HUSKY eligibility, there are more patients enrolled in Medicaid now than ever before. In fact, there are about 40 thousand more. While expanding HUSKY coverage was the first step in improving access to care by reducing the gap of uninsured adults, this robust increase in the number of Medicaid recipients must be met with a subsequent increase in the number of Medicaid providers. Unfortunately, this has not been the case and there is a stark supply and demand crisis in Connecticut. Only two out of three adults enrolled in HUSKY utilize their dental benefits because they cannot access a provider.¹

The shortage of Medicaid providers has been directly attributed to the low reimbursement rates. While the 25% proposed increase is greatly appreciated, there is concern that this will fall short from inciting increased provider participation. The reimbursement rates have remained stagnant since 2008, so a minimal increase certainly would not be enough to alleviate the hardships brought about by these unprecedented times. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rising cost to run a small business has been astronomical and debilitating to many dentists. In addition to the mandated closure of dental offices for several months, returning to work in light of the new CDC recommendations has inherently changed the practice of dentistry. To minimize the transmission of COVID-19 in a high risk environment such

as a dental office, dentists have limited aerosol-generating procedures, increased personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff, and decreased the number of patients treated per day to facilitate social distancing as well as appropriate disinfection. PPE is essential to ensure a safe working environment, and this cost alone has increased to \$16 per patient for each encounter. Masks and gloves have doubled and tripled in cost, respectively.² For oral health providers, the reimbursement rates have been so low and the supply costs so high that treating adults on Medicaid has equated to losing money. Yet, there is a distinct disparity between adult and pediatric reimbursement.

With a separate fee schedule, the Medicaid reimbursement rates for serving adult patients is significantly lower than for pediatric patients. Consequently, more pediatric dentists accept Medicaid.³ It is estimated that 70% of pediatric dentists treat children on Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), or both. This is more than any other dental specialty and comprises about one third of the patient population.⁴ Until now, there has been only one endodontist in the entire state who accepts Medicaid. The proposed increase in the endodontic rate to match the pediatric rate is very much appreciated and is anticipated to make a profound impact in the accessibility of care.

For these reasons, I urge you to increase the adult dental reimbursement rates for parity with the pediatric rates. Please help providers better serve this high-risk population so that adult Medicaid patients can receive the comprehensive dental care that they so desperately need. Thank you for your time and for supporting the oral health of families in Connecticut.



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References:

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<https://www.ctdssmap.com/CTPortal/Provider/Provider-Fee-Schedule-Download>.
- (4) American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (2021). HRSA Title VII Pediatric Dentistry Appropriations and DFLRP Tax Relief [Fact Sheet]. <https://www.aapd.org/advocacy/legislative-and-regulatory-issues/legislative-and-regulatory-fact-sheets/>.